

## [Introduction] The making and unmaking of precarious, ideal subjects – migration brokerage in the Global South

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# The making and unmaking of precarious, ideal subjects –migration brokerage in the Global South

## Introduction to the Special Issue

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The migration literature is often underpinned by the idea that migrants are either completely “free” agents, individually choosing how best to achieve returns on their human capital and resources (Sjaastad 1962) or “agents of development” for their home countries and regions (Turner and Kleist 2013). Conversely they are viewed as exploited slaves, being pushed into low-paid occupations and controlled by middlemen and employers. Unsurprisingly, in many close-knit societies a process as expensive and life-defining as migration is rarely undertaken as an individual act and is shaped by complex social interactions within kinship networks and beyond (Lindquist 2012). Brokerage is ever-present in migrant labour markets around the world, variously interpreted as occupying the “middle space” between migrants and the state, helping migrants navigate complex immigration regimes (Schapendonk 2017; McKeown 2012; Lindquist, Xiang and Yeoh 2012), acting as an extension of the state seeking to outsource border controls (Goh et al 2017) and colluding with employers to cheapen and commoditise migrant labour (Guerin 2013; McCollum and Findlay 2017). It is increasingly recognised that an understanding of contemporary migration is not complete without an understanding of the mediating practices that facilitate and constrain it (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011; Cranston, Schapendonk and Spaan 2017).

This special issue investigates the role that migration brokers play in the subjectivation and precarization of migrant men and women from marginalised classes and ethnicities in the Global South. It shows how these processes are critical for them to become a part of contemporary economic and political systems of international and internal labour circulation. It responds to the call of labour geographers for a deeper understanding of the ways in which diverse economic and social contexts result in complex forms of precarity (Mc Dowell 2015) and adds to the evidence on the role of actors

beyond the workplace in co-creating precarity (Buckley et al 2017). In particular, the case studies shed light on brokerage networks, employment institutions, immigration regimes and citizenship requirements which together precarize migrants' lives. At the same time they examine migrant strategies for negotiating precarity and how processes of mediation themselves may create opportunities for exercising agency. We follow a broad conceptualisation of precarity which encompasses both precariousness as an ontological state of "life" as well as experiences of "labour" which have often emerged as two contrasting positions in the literature on precarity as we discuss in more detail later in this chapter (Strauss 2017). Precariousness can thus be seen as an inherent part of the human condition where some people have more precarious lives than others and these are often the same groups of people who experience precarity at the workplace through unequal power relations (Strauss 2017: 4 citing Meehan and Strauss 2015. See also Ettlinger 2007).

A study of the structures that create and perpetuate precarity would be incomplete without engaging with the acts of agency that migrants use to navigate structures of exploitation and inequality. There is longstanding body of work on forms of agency that are beyond an industrial setting (see for example Buckley et al 2017; Yea 2017; Seo and Skelton 2017; Baey and Yeoh, 2018). Labour geographers including Castree (2008), Coe and Jordhus-Lier (2011), and Carswell and De Neve (2013) have highlighted the importance of a holistic understanding of worker positionality and agency beyond the workplace. They call for more engagement with gender and family identities, ethnicity and racial power dynamics in origin and destination, which are themes that the papers in this special issue engage with. Our point of departure is to highlight the complex role played by brokers in expanding migrant agency and "unmaking" precarious migrant subjects. We highlight the need to draw a conceptual distinction between two different intersections of migration and agency: the first relates to the very act of migration which can be conceptualised as a form of agency allowing migrants to transcend local power inequalities (Harvey 1982, Rogaly 2009; Rai 2018). In the contexts and populations that we discuss in this volume, pre-migration lives are socially and economically constrained by poverty, vulnerability and precarity where migration is opted for as a strategy to transform such conditions. The second which is much less explored in the literature, reflects the notion of brokering practices themselves creating room for migrants to exercise resistance and bargaining power although as we also discuss in the SI, brokerage also constricts, channels and shapes agency. In other words subjectivation/precarization and agency should not be examined as two opposing poles but rather as an inherent part of the migration process where one cannot be separated from the other. We return to the last two aspects in the discussion of the individual papers on page xx and also in the theoretical discussions on precarity and agency.

This special issue draws on research on migration brokerage in the Global South conducted under the Migrating out of Poverty Consortium<sup>1</sup>, and invited authors whose work resonates with this theme. We use the conceptual lens of precarity to understand context-specific manifestations of unfreedom and a lack of citizenship rights for migrants who originate in Sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia. This is a timely collection of papers as critics of research on precarity have argued that northern/western experiences cannot be universalised and the meanings and experiences of precarity in the global South need to inform these debates (Scully 2016). The contributions provide a deeper understanding of contemporary globalised systems of migration originating (and in two of the papers, also culminating) in the Global South and how power dynamics and precarities related to nationality, race, gender and ethnicity are reproduced within them. The need for more research on these dynamics in the Global South has been recently articulated in papers on precarity (see for example Buckley et al 2017; Paret and Gleeson 2016). The subfield of labour geography has further called for more research especially in relation on short-term, undocumented and irregular migrations (Castree 2007) which now represent the experience of a significant proportion of migrants from poorer societies of the world. Our aim here is to provide richly textured accounts of the processes of precarization through ethnographic research on these kinds of migration and the micro-processes that create and reinforce wider patterns of precarity. As such we respond to the call from scholars such Paret and Gleeson (2016) who emphasise the importance of studying the connections between migration and precarity for understanding globalised systems of production and labour circulation and the institutions that create and sustain precarity (278). The papers in the Special Issue throw light on the role of brokers (both informal and government-recognised) in the co-creation of precarity of migrants by examining the experiences of precarity in specific cultural and geographical contexts. They also show how brokers produce ideal migrant subjects to be positioned into specific niches of the labour market in response to economic and governance shifts and how this process goes hand-in-hand with precarization. At the same time the papers also examine migrants' strategies for navigating the subject positions that they are channelled into and whether and how brokers shape these positions.

The papers also speak to the call for a more comparative and grounded approach across different social settings to the study of precarity, agency, and migration (Paret and Gleeson 2016). Such approaches are arguably better at revealing the everyday lived experiences of precarity in specific contexts (Buckley et al 2017; Paret and Gleeson 2017) but also how migrants evaluate brokers and what the implications of brokered migration are for their welfare (Lindquist 2012; Lindquist et al 2012). Included are case studies of brokered migration from Bangladesh, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Ghana, India and Singapore, encompassing extremely diverse im(e)migration, national migration,

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<sup>1</sup> The eight year DFID-funded Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium focuses on the relationship between migration, poverty and development in Africa and Asia with partners in Singapore, Bangladesh, Ghana, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

employment and cultural contexts. They provide much-needed insights into how brokerage and the relations that underpin it are embedded in social relations and axes of differentiation.

Collectively, the papers examine the internal workings and operational logics of brokerage networks in recruiting, training, obtaining official documents and visas, organising journeys and placements at destination. This offers a way of examining the mediation of migration in different places, different micro-spaces and at different points in time, similar to Killia's (2017) conceptual framing of "moments" in the journeys of migrants that she traces to understand the dynamics of female domestic worker migration across different spaces and times. Understanding how brokers connect with other brokers and networks of agencies and individuals involved in facilitating migration expands our understanding of the negotiations and power relations that facilitate and control migration. An intersectional approach or one that recognises how brokerage intersects with wider structures of inequality and opportunity runs through the papers. In doing so they offer thick accounts of the contemporary processes through which migrant subjects are created for movement to places where wealth, capital and political power are concentrated (Cranston et al 2017; McDowell 2008; Buckely et al 2017). They also add to the literature on the precarization of migrants pushed out of rural areas to take up low-paid and insecure work in the cities (Bremner et al 2009, Bremner 1996).

The special issue addresses three interconnected questions that are at the heart of the analysis:

- 1) What role do brokers play in the precarization and production of ideal migrant subjects in contemporary systems of labour circulation?
- 2) What role do brokers play in expanding and contracting migrant agency and what are the temporalities of these kinds of broker-assisted agencies?
- 3) How do southern subjectivities of migration brokerage, embedded in local concepts of morality, legitimacy, success and failure, differ from state-led conceptualisations (which are in turn based on dominant northern/anglo-centric conceptualisations)?

Various bodies of literature are relevant in the discussion here: precarity and the precarization of labour; subjectivation and identity formation; temporalities and agency as well as moralities and trust. Key resources are reviewed together with a brief discussion on how the papers in this issue add to the understanding of the issues highlighted. But first we discuss the different definitions and conceptualisations of the term 'broker'.

### Defining brokers and typologies of brokerage

The informal broker is often the first point of contact for an aspiring migrant and is often an informal broker, who may be a locally influential person, a member of an official body involved in migration or a return migrant with inside knowledge of the workings of border control agencies and the labour market (Faist 2014). Furthermore, brokers are often connected to other formal and informal brokers in complex chains - resulting in "pyramidal" structures (Wise 2013) providing employers a way of

circumventing the responsibility to protect labour enshrined in traditional employment relations. What is relatively under-researched is how different levels of brokers are interrelated (Faist 2014: 44). The papers that follow go part of the way in opening this black box by investigating the ways in which brokers are deeply imbricated in global and national systems of labour recruitment and the structure of labour markets. The case studies presented here show the different modes of operation and how brokers help migrants to traverse different worlds – rural to urban or national to international – through their connections with agents and agencies occupying different time-space niches and acting as gatekeepers for different time-space locales (Goss and Lindquist 1995). Each one of these actors reinforces the institutions at that level by performing as their representatives and redrawing the boundaries and rules that define them. However brokers do not function in a vacuum and are deeply embedded in the broader policy context and linked to institutions and actors who can transcend borders internationally or transcend socially and culturally unconnected places within national borders.

### Precarity and the precarization of labour

While unequal work relations and exploitative working conditions have been discussed since the time of Marx, the concept of precarity as articulated by Bourdieu (1997) has gained popularity and has since been interpreted through different disciplinary perspectives. There is now a substantial and heterogeneous literature on precarity and precariousness (Bove et al 2017; Strauss 2017). On the one hand there are broad, ontological approaches to precariousness that view it as an existential problem of the human condition such as Butler's (2004) work which discusses the fragility and unpredictability of modern lives after the 9/11 attacks. Others have discussed precarization in the context of the transformation of work conditions in Europe from secure to insecure work characterised by jobs lacking in predictability, material or psychological welfare such as zero hour contracts, part time work and fixed period contracts (Barbier 2005, Della Porta et al 2015). Such approaches have typically regarded precarization as the foundation for capital accumulation (Brehman 1985 and Van Der Linden 2014). These works have been critiqued for being "historically-bounded" in their framing of precarity by locating it mainly in post-Fordist employment relations (Munck 2013; Paret and Gleeson 2016; Neilson and Rossiter 2008). These authors have argued that precarity has a much longer history and has long characterised employment relations in the South. Indeed the experiences of precarity that we unpack in this special issue are deeply connected to local histories of marginalisation and inequality as well as being connected to globalising conditions.

Migrants are especially vulnerable to conditions of precarity and there is now a significant body of work on the specificities of precarity among migrant workers (Strauss 2017; Platt et al 2017; Paret and Gleeson 2016; Buckley et al 2017; Strauss and McGrath 2016; Basok et al 2016; Buckley 2014 and Reid-Musson 2014). Precarity is created by workplace dynamics but also by immigration regimes or what Lewis et al (2015) call "the ongoing interplay of neo-liberal labour markets and highly restrictive immigration regimes" (p 3) giving rise to "hyperprecarity". Others, including Menjivar and

Kanstroom (2013), have also drawn attention to the extreme vulnerability of undocumented migrants and those with precarious legal status to being deported. De Genova and Peutz's (2010) concept of "deportation regimes" that allocate different legal statuses in the form of temporary work contracts and permits with strict rules of residence are now a feature of many migrant-receiving countries. Such draconian measures to control migration which often go together with intense surveillance and potential threats of removal create a situation of hyper-precarity that extends beyond the workplace. The papers here examine how such regimes including the Kafala system in Qatar (Deshingkar et al, this SI) and Singapore's work permit system (Wee et al, this SI) precarize migrants. Wee et al apply the concept of conditionality to analyse the pathways in and out of precarity for Indonesian domestic workers in Singapore. Conditionality refers to migrant workers' experiences of precarity being contingent upon a set of formal and informal conditions, the actions of institutional actors, and migrants' own resources and strategies. Migrants movements in and out of precarity is examined using an analogy of chutes-and-ladders to illustrate how brokers influence migrants' pathways and experiences. In doing so, the authors show how the process of precarization is not as random as it initially appears and is in fact dependent on and heightened by compounded conditionality. By this they mean that a number of interrelated conditions must be simultaneously met for the worker's condition to become less precarious. They draw attention to the fact that many of these are outside the worker's control. In other words, the chances of becoming less precarious are very limited.

### Brokers' role in subjectivation and the making of ideal migrants

As the case studies in the special issue show, precarization is closely intertwined with the subjectivation of migrant workers or the "production" and representation of workers embodying certain characteristics that allows them to be pushed into precarious conditions. Migrants seeking employment abroad or jobs in the city must usually go through a process of selection and filtering involving skill or health tests and certification where government agencies, testing centres and brokers are involved. There is plenty of evidence on how brokers and the migration industry are involved in the production, selection, marketing, channelling and placement of workers to match employer preferences (Tyner 2004, Constable 2007). Employers may show preference for certain characteristics such as the age, sex and nationality of workers in international labour markets (Preibisch 2010, Lovebrand 2004). In the case of internal migrants, the paper by Awumbila et al in this volume shows that this can extend to ethnicity and sub-national regions. Additionally, subjective attributes such as being docile, "hardworking" and "loyal" may be demanded by prospective employers (Tyner 2004). Skin colour and religious orientation may also be considered while choosing a worker (Tacoli 1999, Lazaridis 2000, Liang 2011) as well as appearance and speech (Rodriguez and Schwenken 2013). In the case of domestic workers, the ideal is a worker who is reliable, docile, competent, loyal, disciplined and low cost (Tyner 2004: 67). Brokers play a role in discursively ascribing subjective

attributes to certain social groups based on an understanding that these qualities and traits are inborn whereas research emphasises that they are socially constructed.

The social construction, representation and commodification of migrant workers in this way have been variously described as “packaging” (Constable 2007) and “positioning” in the market (Lovebrand 2004) where brokers play a key role. Constable compares the packaging of domestic workers to the marketing of household appliances where different models with different qualities and guarantees are advertised (Constable 2007:69). The ensuing segmentation and ethnicisation of the labour market may impact adversely on the life prospects of specific groups which remain socially excluded and limited to certain niches in the labour market. Others have drawn attention to the construction of migrant identities through these practices (Cranston 2016; Shubin and Findlay, 2014). Rodriguez and Schewenken argue that the migration industry is not only classifying workers based on these traits but also “producing” them through a process of subjectivation/subjectification. The production and channelling of workers with different qualities may happen even before they have left their own country (Rodriguez and Schwenken 2013). Geographers have drawn attention to broker practices, where certain social groups are positioned as inferior within structures of power and domination and these differences are produced and maintained across spaces and scales to order and segment migrant workers into low paid and insecure jobs; for example Linda McDowell’s (2008) analysis of the ‘construction of difference’.

We explore understudied labour markets in the Global South to add to the literature on precarization and subjectivation. Picherit (this issue) focuses on the role that brokers play in producing the precarious, ideal subject in the context of contemporary systems labour circulation in the construction industry in Southern India. He analyses how rural Dalit workers in India are commoditised by brokers from their own community to access work opportunities in urban construction. These systems of labour recruitment and placement are embedded in the remnants of feudal systems of patronage and exploitation. While there has been extensive research on the inequalities and power dynamics in construction work in India and the role of brokers in exploitation (Mosse et al 2005, Pattenden 2012, Olsen and Ramanamurthy 2000), the connection with wider processes that go beyond the workplace have received insufficient attention. Picherit examines how brokers of migrant labour in the Chittoor region of southern India represent low-caste Dalit workers and how they link up and negotiate with the wider “mafiaesque” nexus between big business, bureaucrats and politicians. Picherit shows how migration brokerage in Southern India plays a role in the making of an ideal Dalit migrant for precarious and low-paid jobs in the construction sector. Brokers use “dalitness” as an identity to penetrate and position their workers in a labour market segmented by caste where they promote Dalit migrant labourers as cheap, depoliticized and docile. The paper offers insights into how the processes within the construction industry that create precarity are inextricably linked to precarity in other spaces of Dalit existence.



Awumbila et al (this issue) provide powerful illustrations of how good girls (p. 9-10) are constructed, for positioning in urban and overseas domestic labour markets. There, brokers are involved in moulding “villagers” into subservient female domestic workers by training them in culturally tuned-in ways of showing respect, such as calling employers “mummy” and “daddy”, using unfamiliar terms such as “please”, “thank you” and “sorry” and dressing appropriately. In doing so, they are made to suppress ethnic identities and forms of behaviour that may offend employers. At the same time, brokers facilitating international migration for domestic work from Ghana are also trying to create another kind of ideal migrant – one who behaves in an honourable fashion and does not bring shame to their country and one that remits dutifully back to their country and family.

Other kinds of subjectivation and production of ideal migrants are discussed in the papers on Cape Verde and Bangladesh. In the paper on Cape Verde and Cameroon by Alpes and Akesson (this issue), the government sanctioned CAMPO project tries to educate and inform aspiring migrants to conform with state driven understandings of what constitutes an ideal migrant, which is a “legal” subject. The rationale of CAMPO was to prevent the existence of “illegal” Cape Verdeans in Europe and promote “legal” migration as defined by the European Union. The project’s legitimacy hinged on differentiating between legal and illegal migrants and promoting legal migration through its public information campaigns. CAMPO highlighted the risks of deportation, trafficking and sexual abuse in illegal migration but as we discuss in the section on moralities below, this had little effect on persuading migrants against informal brokers. Similar practices were observed by Deshingkar et al (this issue) in Bangladesh as well where subjectivation was undertaken in relation to state requirements to get migrants through on the tightly controlled quota system. The research shows how brokers and other actors in the migration industry collude to ascribe false identities, circumvent border controls and position Bangladeshi migrant workers in situations of hyper-precarity both in terms of their legal status in the destination country but also at the workplace. “Ideal” migrant subjects were “produced’ through the falsification of documents related to their skills and through stereotypes about the inherent qualities of Bangladeshi men as meek and accepting of exploitative conditions. Bangladeshis were seen as less deserving of the same remuneration as other nationalities and this discrimination and stereotyping sustained segmented labour markets in Qatar.

Brokers’ role at the intersection of class, gender, ethnicity and nationality in shaping transnational mobility thus becomes obvious. Rather than challenging hierarchies and inequalities in the societies that they are helping to insert migrants into, they seek to position migrants in ways that are acceptable to the ruling classes in destination cities or countries. Migrants themselves may perform these ideal migrant roles to promote themselves in the labour market (Liang 2011) or get across borders. This performativity fudges the boundaries between brokers role in precarization and creating room for agency as we discuss below.

### Migrant agency in brokerage

While a number of scholars have examined the new forms of agency and subjectivity that contemporary forms of mobility are embedded in (Castles 2002; Goldring and Landolt 2011; Rogaly and Thieme 2012; Ong 2006), much less attention has been given to the ways in which brokers help migrants achieve their goals and buttress their agency. Efforts to classify agency in terms of its transformative effects on structures of inequality have distinguished between on the one hand, small acts of resilience and resistance which may provide ways of coping with oppression and some improvements in working conditions, and on the other hand, those that can rework power relations (Katz 2004). Our focus here is on the specificities of migrant agency within brokerage which we view through a relational lens to distinguish between a) the extension of migrant agency by brokers wherein they assist migrants in transgressing local socio-economic boundaries by moving away and b) the potential for brokerage to offer opportunities for resistance against and mitigation of precarity at destination as well as the potential for shifts in subject positions over time.

With regards to the first point, it has been documented in other contexts that migrant strategies for transgressing physical and social boundaries regions of origin are inextricably bound with migrant intermediaries and other actors in the migration industry (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg-Sorensen, 2013; Cranston et al., 2018). The second point is well researched in the scholarship on migrant smuggling which recognises agency in processes of mediation (Van Liempt and Doomernik 2006; Van Liempt 2007; Zhang, Sanchez, Achilli 2018). For example, in their paper on migrants smuggled into The Netherlands from Iraq, the Horn of Africa and the erstwhile Soviet Union, Van Liempt and Doomernik (2006) challenge the idea that migrants have no agency in the process of smuggling. They illustrate the differing degrees of autonomy that migrants have in deciding where and how they want to travel but stress that they ultimately remain vulnerable to precarity and exclusion. The case studies examined in this special issue add to this discussion by emphasising the different ways in which brokers help migrants in exercising agency including assistance with performing ideal migrant roles, bargaining with potential employers and support with switching jobs. Wee et al's paper unpacks the relationship between unpredictability and uncertainty and broker practices further to show how brokers produce precarity through "chutes" that the migrants can fall into but they can also patch these precarities and set migrants on to ladders of upward social mobility. The authors discuss the issue of the discretionary weekly day off for migrant workers in Singapore which has been left to negotiations between workers and employers. But there is no guarantee that precarity will be reduced and this hinges on a number of processes and strategies that the worker must mobilise. Some agents may actively open the chute by hiring only those workers who are willing to give up their days off. The uncertainty of the route that domestic workers have to follow is created by brokers and employers patching or opening up chutes to redistribute precarity between the different parts of the migration industry.

In Ghana, urban brokers are a critical source of material support for rural girls and women with few social networks in the city (Awumbila et al, this issue). The authors show the contradictory role played by brokers in the placement of female domestic workers. On the one hand brokers are a critical component of the system that reproduces precarious work regimes but on the other hand they also provide them with opportunities for exploring the job market in Accra which they cannot do by themselves because domestic jobs require guarantors and character references. Brokers may also assist migrants with switching jobs and moving up the job ladder but whether or not they do so depends on how they evaluate the migrants' attributes and abilities and the strategies that the migrants themselves employ to convince the brokers to act on their behalf. Brokers are well positioned to bargain with potential employers on wages and work conditions but they consider these in relation to the worker's experience and abilities. The authors thus show how brokers create paths in as well as out of precarity but in unpredictable ways, thus chiming with the findings of the paper by Wee et al. In India, brokers placing Dalit workers in urban construction work amplify the bargaining power of the migrants under them by representing them as docile and hardworking and therefore as ideal workers for the job (Picherit, this issue). In doing so they help them access (relatively) well paid urban jobs in urban construction that are critical for migrants fulfilling their life goals. However they do so by presenting their identities as lower-caste and unskilled and assist in the performativity of these caste identities to access particular niches in the labour market. While this reproduces caste inequalities it also enables rural Dalits to access urban jobs and the potential to transform their lives. Migrants rank and evaluate the brokers that they work with according to the prospects they offer for upward mobility and Picherit argues that in such a context, coercion has only a limited impact. Aspects of performativity and subjectivation are also explored in the Bangladesh-Qatar case study by Deshingkar et al shows which shows how aspiring migrants are assisted by brokers in performing ideal subject roles. While this positions them in precarious work, it gets them to their desired destination and opens up opportunities for further work. Alpes and Akesson discuss how migrants decide not to engage with CAMPO and pursue their own routes and assistance for migrating which conveys a sense of agency. Despite the programme efforts to portray migrants as ignorant and deficient in information and themselves as the only legitimate migration managers, the migrants themselves chose informal brokers to assist them in their migration projects as they saw more potential through such routes.

Implicit in the papers is also a call to incorporate an understanding of the temporalities of brokered migration. In contrast to conceptualisations of migration and brokerage as a single "event" frozen in time, workers' accounts show that they take a longer term view that incorporates possibilities of changing levels of precarity and wellbeing. While the importance of considering temporalities in the analysis of migration has been stressed in a number of studies, it has taken varied positions. Two areas of enquiry are evident: first greater attention to temporalities in migration have been called for

in recognition of the non-linear and complex patterns of migration with varied durations, stages and hazy boundaries between temporary and permanent migration (Robertson 2014, Rogaly and Thieme 2012), and second, attempts to understand the spatio-temporal reorderings and transformations that migrants experience through an analysis of migration dynamics in the past, present and future drawing on life-course theories (Bailey 2009; Kobayashi and Preston 2007; Hopkins and Pain, 2007). In any case, scholars have long noted the fact that migrants are striving for a better life and so incorporates a vision of the future (Piore 1979). Some scholars have made more explicit references to temporalities. Bastia and McGrath (2011) as well as O'Connell Davidson (2013) argue that crippling debts and unfree working conditions in the present may be suffered to gain freedoms in the future; in effect, mortgaging the present to an anticipated future (Bastia and McGrath 2011).

The papers here address how migrant experiences of precarity and agency may change over the course of migration and how this is entangled with brokerage. We heed the call of labour geographers to look at the timing of particular actions and the expected gains (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011, p10.). Research on the geography of waiting offers useful concepts for examining the short term and long term strategies that migrants employ to overcome precarity. There are two strands of research on waiting: one where enforced waiting is examined as a form of control by powerful groups over others (Olson 2015), and another which conceptualizes waiting undertaken by migrants as a form of agency. Axelsson, Malmberg and Zhang's (2017) paper on Chinese restaurant workers in Sweden takes such an approach by examining different work-time configurations of living and work to understand how precarity is maintained and challenged. Their analysis of the acceptance of precarious work-time arrangements by Chinese migrants to achieve certain life course trajectories resonates with our findings in Bangladesh. The paper by Deshingkar et al shows how Bangladeshi migrants accept and wait out precarious and degrading work in Qatar as a strategy to mobilise resources for improving living conditions at home and building social networks that have the potential to lead to better employment in the future. The paper by Awumbila et al also engages with different work-time arrangements by showing how migrant domestic workers contact brokers after a period of time to help them with switching jobs to move up the job ladder where earnings and working conditions are better. In the paper on southern India by Picherit, elements of broker-assisted agency and temporalities in their changing material position are discussed in juxtaposition to their circumstances before migration. The paper shows how Dalit labourers use brokers to ensure access to jobs, guaranteed wages as well as physical protection in working areas. Furthermore, they expect the brokers to provide market intelligence on the best work opportunities and access to political brokers who control anti-poverty schemes. They are able to exercise these demands as their bargaining power has been strengthened by wider opportunities in the labour market. The author maintains that brokerage is one of the few pathways to social mobility out of the highly disadvantaged position of belonging to the Dalit caste in rural areas.

### Moralities, legitimacy and trust

The difficulty in separating facilitation and help from exploitation and extortion has been noted in several recent studies (Osella 2014; Lindquist 2012; Gameltoft-Hansen and Sorensen 2013: 12). Profit and trust often “run hand-in-hand in between brokers and migrants, and distinctions between them are often impossible to sustain in practice” (Lindquist, Xiang, & Yeoh, 2012). While these contradictions may unsettle government constructs of ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ or theoretical concepts of ‘moral’ and ‘immoral’, they do not necessarily appear problematic for migrants themselves. As Faist (2014), Osella (2014) and the papers by Alpes and Akesson as well as Deshingkar et al in this volume show, migrants are more concerned about improving their life chances rather than whether the migration is legal or not. In fact, migrants and their families may perceive brokerage as a moral act where there is no conflict between profit-making and social trust (Faist 2014). Picherit’s paper on brokerage in construction work in southern India uncovers the fluidity between moralities such as friendship, caste ties and profit in brokers’ day-to-day practices. The paper examines how Dalit brokers negotiate ambivalent roles, moralities and practices across politics and labour to contribute to the fabric of labour circulation at the bottom of the political and economic ladder. Similarly, the case study of Ghana by Awumbila et al shows how closely entwined the moral and profit-making motives of brokers are where brokers perform protective duties as patrons without any immediate monetary expectation. Their main reward seems to be a consolidation of their reputation and social standing in the community.

A major weakness of the profiteering argument is that it divorces brokerage from the moral and social context in which it occurs. The papers in this volume throw light on how brokers function in the diverse cultures of Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Cameroon and Singapore and how trust is built and performed, the social sanctions that exist if trust is broken, when broker actions are regarded as acceptable or not and how migrants evaluate their experiences and their long term life chances. The case studies also show how brokers assist people with few opportunities for gainful employment and a lack of access to market intelligence, know-how related to cultures at destination and a lack of “know-who” as well, i.e. contacts at destination and enable them to integrate and find work (Osella and Osella 2009). Migrants’ perceptions about these messy arrangements where altruism and morality collide with profiteering and illegal business are unpacked in detail in the papers to throw light on how they weigh up informal brokers against state sanctioned and legal ways of migrating.

While brokers are sometimes vilified as the main source of exploitation of disadvantaged and marginalised communities by the state and international development agencies, migrants’ own accounts indicate that they do not regard suboptimal working conditions and being cheated on wages as a failure of migration or the broker as an unworthy investment (Alpes 2013, Lindquist 2012, Osella 2014). Typically the state attempts to delegitimize brokers while presenting itself as the only trustworthy mediator in migration. Empirical evidence on the implementation of such programmes in

the papers on Cape Verde, Cameroon and Bangladesh show how abysmally they have failed and why migrants continue to rely on informal brokers.

The case studies show that there is a need to move to a different understanding of legitimacy and success in brokerage. In their paper on Cape Verde and Cameroon, Alpes and Akesson contrast discourses and constructions of legitimacy within government and among migrants regarding two types of brokers namely CAMPO, a state-managed EU programme in Cape Verde and two Cameroonian development NGOs run by businessmen. Ethnographic research indicates that aspiring migrants distrust the official management agency CAMPO. In contrast unofficial or illegal organisations set up by powerful businessmen and public figures are more trusted. There are parallels with the situation in Bangladesh described by Deshingkar et al where officially sanctioned brokers are less trusted than informal brokers. As in many other countries, there is a strong moral discourse against informal brokers in Bangladesh. There is a long history of government efforts to eliminate and regulate brokers and establish itself as the monopoly migration mediator. However interviews with migrants who have returned from Qatar or are preparing to go again reveals a more nuanced relationship based on culturally grounded notions of trust and reciprocity. While the hardships encountered by migrants may lead outsiders to regard their migration as a failure, migrants themselves describe the process in more ambivalent terms and appear to accept hardship as well as some cheating by the brokers as a necessary cost in their quest for a better future.

Two of the papers in the Special Issue by Awumbila et al and Picherit, discuss the everyday practices of brokers in internal migration, a topic that has received scant attention in the scholarship on the migration industry and brokerage. While the literature on the migration industry in international migration has grown exponentially in the last couple of decades, corresponding research in internal migration remains thin. This is partly to do with the preoccupation of migration researchers and the agencies that fund them with transnational movements into richer countries in the global North, but also because brokerage networks within countries are predominantly informal, “below the radar” and difficult to trace and research.

A final note on the disciplinary leanings of the papers. Although it could be assumed that geographers would have an advantage in exploring the spatialities and temporalities of brokerage, preoccupied as they are with space, place and time, other disciplines notably anthropology and sociology have also addressed these questions. It is this intersection and blurring of boundaries across social sciences that this special issue takes advantage of. The different papers are theoretically diverse but unified in their focus on unpicking the inner workings of brokerage to reveal the day to day practices that perpetuate divisions in the labour market and create identities whereby men and women from disadvantaged backgrounds are relegated to poorly paid jobs. At the same time, they discuss how migrants, their

families and the communities that they come from use brokers to fulfil their long-term goals and why they continue migrating through them despite efforts to eliminate them.

The papers in this volume extend the theoretical and empirical understanding of the contradictory and complex role played by brokers in creating precarity and mitigating it. Collectively they examine the role of brokers and other actors in the migration industry in structuring migration patterns which create and reproduce segmented labour markets and global inequalities in migration. They look at how brokers produce migrant identities through their practices of representation and channelling and how in doing so they create ideal, precarious subjects for contemporary systems of migration and employment.

The papers connect neoliberal processes of structuring of capital and labour at the macro level with individual experiences of precarity. The different case studies bring into sharp focus the differing modalities of brokerage at different spatio-temporal scales and interrogate the ways in which they are embedded in diverse cultural contexts and social relations. They demonstrate how migrants' view of the life trajectory that they embark on through brokers is fundamentally different to the way that governments and the international development community view the process. Although the empirically grounded accounts show that inequality characterizes most migrant-broker relations, they also highlight a process of negotiation in which brokers and migrants should be understood as co-perpetuating complex circuits of migrant circulation on which they both depend. Hence a significant contribution of this volume is to show how brokerage creates and bolsters the structures that produce 'good migrants' and precarities, but over time, migrants may successfully negotiate and challenge these structures with the potential for social and economic transformation.

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